(e) what action Government are taking to ensure fair investigation so that guilty persons are not spared?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (e) In 1997, STC's role in urea deal was scrutinized by CBI who after discreet verification have closed the ease.

Challenge to Patenting of Basmati

807. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item appear ing in the Economic Times, dated 10th September, 1998, under the caption "Pak ditches India in battle of basmati";

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what is Government's reaction in regard thereto: and

(d) what are the reasons for not taking any step to challenge the basmati patent granted to U.S. company, Rice Tec. Inc.?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) The news-item in brief states that "Pakistan has decided not to. join forces with India in fighting the basmati patent granted to US company Rice Tec Inc, and instead is challenging it independently in the US Patent Office". According to the available information Pakistan had not filed an appeal against the patent granted to Ricetec. However, Pakistan had formally sent a letter protesting to the US Patent and Trade Mark Office against the grant of the patent to Ricetec and have reserved the right to challenge the issue of the patent.

(d) Patents are granted by respective Governments under their Patents laws. Whenever information is received about patents being taken on certain products which are of commercial interest to India and which in our views do not satisfy the criteria of patentability, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged. After sufficient material is gathered, steps are taken for filing a petition for re-examination and ultimate revocation of patent in that country.

Export of Onions and Potatoes

808. SHRI SITARAM KESRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has been exporting onions and potatoes;

(b) if so, since when;

(c) whether the import of these items has been lifted;

(d) if so, since when and whether these items have been put under OGL; and

(e) if so, since when and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. While the exports of onion from India had been taking place even before independence, the exports of potatoes started from 1957-58.

(c) to (e) In order to augment the domestic availability of onion and arrest its rising prices, imports of onion have been freely permitted with effect from 15th October, 1998. As regards import policy for potatoes, these are in the restricted list of imports and can .be imported only against a licence or in accordance with public notice issued by the Office of DGFT in this regard.

Textile and Leather Exports

809. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's textile and leather exports to Germany were hit hard in the first half of calender year 1998;

(b) if .so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government propose to take some steps ensuring no further downward trend in export of textiles and

leather in the interest of textile and leather units of country;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Exports of different textile and leather items from India to Germany in the first half of 1998 have shown mixed performance. While the overall export of textiles during this period registered a net increase, there was a decline in the export of leather items.

The reasons for the decline include overall decline in German Imports, competition from the South East Asian countries due to their currency deprivation advantage, lag created by closure/re-location of tanneries within India having a delayed effect, inadequate diversification in product range etc.

(c) to (e) Government continues to take steps to increase export of different products from India to Germany including textiles and leather. These include preparation of market surveys/reports/ news bulletins etc. and their dissemination, follow-up of various trade related issues both at the Government and at business level, focussed participation in international trade fairs and exhibitions, assistance to business delegations etc.

Business with US Companies

810. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA:
SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:
SHRI SURESH KALMADI:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that US Govern ment have banned a number of Indian companies and their subsidiaries from having any business with the US com panies;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) what is its likely impact on the Indian economy; and

(d) what is Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) USA announced certain restrictive economic measures under its Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1994 against India first on 13th May 1998 in the wake of the nuclear explosions by India. On 29th May 1998 the Bureau of Export Administration (BXA) under US Department of Commerce announced certain interim guidelines imposing restrictions on US exports of dual use goods and technology which were earlier subject to export licencing, followed by a notification of specific measures on 18th June 1998. On 19th November 1998, the US has notified 40 Indian entities along with 200 subordinate entities, which will be covered by export restrictions. The list specifics the entities believed to have been involved in the nuclear and missile related programmes and includes organisations in the field of atomic energy, space, defence, establishments involved in conventional military activities and a number of Indian public and private sector companies. US exporters would require licences to export to the listed entities and most licences would be denied, except for items intended to ensure the safety of civil aviation and safe operation of commercial passenger aircraft.

(c) and (d) The Government has been closely monitoring the economic measures announced against India and continuously assessing their likely impact. Though any precise quantification of the impact of the economic measures may be difficult, so far the impact has been minimal. The fundamentals of the Indian economy arc strong enough to be able to withstand any pressure arising out of the economic sanctions.